

Commonly asked questions:

Can I get more information on the protective measures that I can take?

We would be happy to send you a copy of our “Erosion Control” pamphlet which contains information on things you can do to protect your property. This information is also available on the County’s web site www.sbcounty.gov. One thing you should consider is purchasing Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood insurance if you have not already done so. Information on the National Flood Insurance Program is available by calling your insurance agent or (888) 724-6011.

I am not able to place sandbags myself because I am elderly (or disabled) can the County do this work for me?

Unfortunately it is not possible for County forces to do this work on private property; however there are various charitable organizations that have been helping people with sandbags, they are local Boy Scout Troops and several church groups.

Why isn’t the letter more specific as to whether or not my home is at risk and from what?

The situation is unpredictable. As stated in the letter flash flooding, mud slides, and debris flows can happen anywhere along the foothills and downstream of the burn areas. Debris, made much worse by the fires, can block watercourses and alter the way runoff would normally flow. Even if your home is unaffected, roads to and from your neighborhood could become impassable by flooding, mud, and/or debris. We feel it is far better to have everyone in and near the burn areas or existing flood control facilities be prepared to protect their properties if possible and to evacuate if necessary.

Is there some place I can go to get additional or more specific information?

If you live within one of the cities affected you can call your City Flood Plain Manager (usually the City Engineer). If you live within the County we can have a person from our Water Resources Division call you back. Please understand that this letter was sent to more than 100,000 property owners so it may take a little time to return your call but we will get back with you as quickly as possible. (Take a message with the person’s location.) Another source is the State of California Department Office of Emergency Services (OES) at (916) 845-8200, the US Department of Forestry at (202) 205-8333 or (909) 382-2600, and the US Geological Service (USGS) at (888) 275-8747 they have web sites containing information you may find useful.

I live near a flood control channel (or basin) is that going to protect me?

Flood control facilities or natural watercourses can be overwhelmed when runoff occurs following fires. The runoff can carry large amounts of mud and debris that can block watercourses, fill basins, and cause flooding to occur outside of the usual path of the water. The protection these facilities would normally provide may be diminished.

What should I do if I begin to see flooding in my neighborhood?

Do not report usual runoff but if the storm brings with it mud and debris flows or seems considerably greater than normal, immediately contact the office of your City Engineer or our County Department of Public Works at (909) 387-8063.

What warning systems are in place to advise us when flooding is eminent?

Watch the weather forecasts and listen to the radio. Pay attention to flood watch and flood warnings!

What is the difference between a flood watch and a flood warning?

Both are National Weather Service Terms. A watch indicates a hazard is possible, for example that conditions are more favorable than usual for its occurrence. A watch is a recommendation for planning, preparation, and increased awareness. A warning indicates that a particular hazard is either imminent or has been reported. A warning indicates the need to take action to protect life and property.

When would it be wise to evacuate my home?

That depends upon where you live. Take emergency steps when you think it is necessary. If you are in an area that has already experienced problems in previous storms you may choose to evacuate when a flood watch situation is announced. Emergency personnel will evacuate you if they can get to you but there is the possibility that if you wait too long, evacuating may not be the best course of action or impossible.

Where do I evacuate to?

Emergency personnel are working on that issue. The problem is extensive and complex. We will publish shelter sites when a plan is developed. You can call the Red Cross at anytime during a flooding event to see if they have a place arranged.

I have children who attend schools or daycare. How do I know if it is safe to send them to school or to their preschool?

Talk to your schools or daycare providers they probably have an emergency plan. You may decide that the school or daycare is a safer location than home. Get their emergency numbers and have them handy. Pay attention to flood warnings and watches and decide if you feel comfortable sending your child to someone else's care.

Why was this information not available before?

This information has been available and has been repeatedly broadcast on television and radio and many articles have appeared in the local newspapers.

A flood control basin near my house is full. When will it be cleaned out?

Corps and County forces are working to clear all the basins. Many of the smaller basins are already cleared. It is our plan to clean all of them. This problem is larger than ever before and this effort takes time but we have crews working around the clock. If you wish a more specific time frame I can have someone from our Flood Control Operations Division call you back. (Take a message that includes where the person is located so we can determine the basin location).

The noise of the truck and tractors at night is bothering me. Why do they have to work at night and how long will it continue?

We are sorry for the noise but it is unavoidable. This emergency work is being done night and day to clear the basins before the next storms. The basins are critical to the flood protection for the downstream areas. The larger basins will take longer to clear. Noise may continue for many weeks in some areas, others may be only a few days. This could repeat following more storms.

There is dust on the streets. When will you clean it up?

We are pursuing street sweeping periodically during the clearing of the flood control facilities. Please give me the location of your concern and I will pass it along to the street sweeping effort (Flood Control Operations). Please be patient as this problem extends over a large area but we will get to your area. During high winds dust should be anticipated.

What is the government doing to protect my home or stop the damage?

Massive efforts are ongoing but there is not time or money to build large dams or expensive projects. We are working with the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and the US Army Corps of Engineers in many locations to determine what protective measures can be taken if any in a short time frame. We recommend you take measures to protect yourselves. Sand and sandbags have been made available at fire stations. Purchase flood insurance if you have not already done so.

Hasn't all the mud that is going to come down already happened?

No. More storms will probably cause more debris and more mudflows. History following smaller fires has shown us that these incidents can repeat. Erosion is a naturally occurring event but it can be magnified greatly when slopes are denuded of vegetation.

Why did I get a letter? I have never had flooding before in my neighborhood.

The area of distribution was selected for the proximity to the burn areas or areas near flood control facilities that were identified by FEMA to be subject to possible overflows. Areas were blanketed by mailings since access to homes or businesses may become difficult even if structures are unaffected. We are advising people in these areas that flood insurance is a relatively inexpensive protection but it takes 30 days to become effective.

I did not get a letter myself. Why not?

You may still receive one later as the more than 100,000 letters are being mailed out over several days. The letter was sent to property owners and they were directed to inform their tenants if you are a renter.